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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 3160
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 7102
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0815
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3621
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 5470
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SUBJECT: WHY AL-QA'IDA WOULD HAVE DIFFICULTY GAINING
TRACTION IN J&K

REF: NEW DELHI 4928

¶1. (SBU) Summary: We -- and many of our contacts -- are skeptical about the July 13 telephone claim by a man calling himself "al-Qa'ida's Kashmir spokesman Abu Hadeed" to Current News Service in Srinagar -- our J&K journalist contacts say terrorist groups regularly use CNS to distribute their messages to the media, earning it the nickname "Kashmir's Al-Jazeera." Many Kashmiris have publicly denounced the announcement of al-Qa'ida operating in Kashmir as a hoax, but these same spokespersons have distanced themselves nonetheless from any connection to the group. In our assessment, although J&K clearly is fertile ground for terrorism, al-Qa'ida would have to overcome cultural hurdles to establish a presence beyond such affiliated terrorist groups as Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), unless we are witnessing the morphing of a preexisting group into a Kashmir-based al-Qa'ida group to gain access to global jihadi funding. This does not rule out a possible expansion of the group into the region, but we judge that if such a move met with success, it would be because of the tangible benefits al-Qa'ida could provide, and not from any social or cultural affinities. End Summary.

Kashmiris Say 7/13 Announcement Probably a Hoax

¶2. (SBU) Reportedly speaking in Urdu, the so-called Abu Hadeed named as "Kashmir's al-Qa'ida Chief" one Abu Abdur Rahman Ansari, and "expressed happiness" at the Mumbai terrorist attacks, which he claimed were "a reaction to the

oppression in India of minorities in general and Muslims in particular." Additional Director General of Police Kuldeep Khoda (Reftel) told us police tracked the call to a public calling booth in downtown Srinagar and questioned the owner, who said he did not know the caller but described him as "looking Kashmiri." CNS journalist Rashid Rahi, who took the call, told the Christian Science Monitor that Hadeed "spoke pure Urdu" and "was a Pakistani."

¶3. (SBU) This is the first time anyone has publicly claimed to represent a direct al-Qa'ida presence in Kashmir.; Both Abu Hadeed and Abu Abdur Rahman Ansari are Arabic names, which are not common in India and are possibly noms du guerre.; Hadeed claimed al-Qa'ida in Kashmir would issue regular statements, with all future communication only in Arabic.; The statement drew swift denials from various corners of J&K:

-- If the accounts of the press and Khoda are accurate, the inconsistencies in the reporting about the caller -- a man claiming to have an Arab (not Urdu) name looking like a Kashmiri and speaking Urdu -- suggest the caller may have been trying to mask a Kashmiri identity.

-- Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq told reporters that although the Kashmir movement had a "military dimension," there was "no role" (in his stated opinion) for al-Qa'ida. He called the event a hoax designed to malign the separatists. Other leading separatists, from outsiders Shabir Shah and Sajjad Gani Lone to pro-Pakistan hardliner SAS Geelani, issued similar statements.

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-- Junai-ul-Islam, spokesman for Hizbul Mujahedeen -- the largest ethnic Kashmiri terrorist organization -- publicly agreed that the announcement was a hoax, claimed there never was nor would be space for al-Qa'ida in the Kashmir movement, and condemned the Mumbai blasts as an "act of terrorism."

-- Our journalist contacts, including "Indian Express" Bureau Chief Muzamil Jaleel and "The Hindu" correspondent Shujaat Bukhari, also believe a local conducted this call-in.

J&K Fertile Ground for Local Terrorists

¶4. (SBU) J&K is undeniably fertile ground for terrorist recruitment, but we question whether al-Qa'ida can take root there. The grievances we hear from our contacts (and their contacts) tend to be local/regional in nature (i.e. Delhi-Srinagar or Indo-Pak).; There appears to be almost no solid affiliation with pan-Islamic causes like Palestine or Chechnya, which may limit, but not rule out, recruitment. The notable exception here was anger over the controversial Danish cartoons, but even that was muted compared to the outbursts of outrage seen in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. We doubt whether a global jihadist message can successfully appeal to Kashmiri extremists, when compared to the more local nature of al-Qa'ida affiliates Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, and other local/regional organizations who play on the tangible grievances of a population besieged by both terrorists and security forces. Even the cross-border jihadi groups receive less support than indigenous groups like Hizbul Mujahedeen.

Kashmiri Clannishness Would Complicate al-Qa'ida Recruiting

¶5. (SBU) When the Kashmiri militancy first began accommodating "foreign fighters" -- primarily Pakistanis but also some Afghans and Arabs -- they were welcomed with open arms as "guest militants" in the parlance of the Valley. However, cultural clashes led to prison fights and even mini-wars between Kashmiri and outside terrorist groups. Kashmiri clannishness and suspicion of "foreigners,"

including Indians from other parts of the country, would complicate local recruitment in J&K:

-- Many Kashmiris already firmly differentiate themselves from Indians and Pakistanis, and maintain a social-cultural distance from both groups resulting in a nearly island mentality (Reftel). This distance has evolved, and is reinforced, by J&K's physical isolation from the rest of India. Groups whose ultimate allegiance is to either a non-South Asian leader or extra-regional goals will have trouble pitching their message to this clannish population. We know al-Qa'ida is able to recruit non-Arabs; we are less certain how well they can recruit Kashmiris.

-- From our J&K police and journalist contacts, as well as NGO activists -- some of whom are former terrorists -- our sense is that there is no firm anti-US sentiment in J&K. At worst, we encounter disappointment in USG policy, not hatred, including through indirect reporting.

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-- Kashmiri terror organizations like Hizbul Mujahedeen appeal to nationalist sentiments. Cross-border groups like LeT and JeM, who are populated by non-Kashmiris, already maintain an outward-looking jihadi orientation. Public GOI estimates of the J&K terrorist (population suggest around 75% of the 1400 "active terrorists" in J&K are Kashmiri.

-- We cannot predict how established al-Qa'ida affiliates LeT and JeM would react to an al-Qa'ida branch in their area of operation.

-- Recruitment into Kashmiri (and, we believe, jihadi) groups is often by personal connections; a terrorist might try to recruit his brother or cousin, but not recruit or be recruited by a stranger. Indian press has even reported anecdotal incidents of Hindus joining terrorist groups, via their Muslim friends, seeking a paying job. Furthermore, many terror groups active in J&K are themselves off-shoots of prior terror groups, vice "greenfield" organizations, although a Kashmir-based al-Qa'ida might seek to follow this paradigm.

-- As a future "Abu Hadeed" would know if he conducted the terrorist equivalent of market research, the use of Arabic over Urdu or Kashmiri marks the organization as an outsider.

-- The high level of mistrust of all outsiders, coupled with the pervasive belief in conspiracy in J&K, may well lead some potential recruits to be dismiss any alleged "al-Qa'ida" as a sting operation conducted by Indian security forces.

What Kind of al-Qa'ida Is It?

16. (SBU) The creation of an "al-Qa'ida in Kashmir" begs the question of what kind of al-Qa'ida may arise. Likely possibilities include:

-- A new group -- either indigenous or exogenous -- with bona fide al-Qa'ida links may emerge. This scenario envisions al-Qa'ida fighters, with or without prior links to J&K, operating in the region. Such a group might be a spin-off under its own control, or it may retain connections to other al-Qa'ida organizations.

-- A preexisting terrorist group may change its name to "al-Qa'ida in Kashmir," either with or without permission from the main al-Qa'ida group. Cross-border jihadi groups such as LeT and JeM already are known to operate under multiple names, including paper-thin "names of convenience."

-- As with the previous scenario, a collection of terrorists from several groups may come together to form an "al-Qa'ida in Kashmir," again either with or without permission from the

main al-Qa'ida group. As noted above, many current jihadi groups were themselves spun out of other groups, some of which are now defunct.

-- It is also possible that Kashmiris (or Pakistanis) with no connection to the international jihadi movement might create an "al-Qa'ida in Kashmir" with the hope of joining into the larger al-Qa'ida.

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Comment: How al-Qa'ida Might Attract Followers

¶7. (SBU) The above is not to rule out entirely al-Qa'ida achieving a foothold in J&K; although he doubted the veracity of the July 13 phone call, Kuldeep Khoda refused to rule out the possibility of a future al-Qa'ida in Kashmir.

-- The group does have several assets, including name recognition, a history of successful spectacular attacks, and funding which the group could use to provide cutting-edge weapons and a payroll to willing cadres. Its possible success would not lie in cultural or political affiliation, but on what tangibles the organization has to offer.

-- Although the global jihad message may not resonate in J&K, appealing to the endemic feelings of alienation (and in many cases occupation, see Reftel) might. An al-Qa'ida recruiter pitching to disaffected Kashmiris -- such as the ex-terrorists described in Reftel who say they are routinely humiliated by security forces -- an opportunity to retaliate against Indian troops may hit home.

-- Bin Ladin's relatively recent inclusion of Kashmiris in his recorded speeches may also help shape the ground for recruitment.

-- Al-Qa'ida is also well positioned geographically to expand or spill over from the arc of northern Afghanistan and Pakistan into J&K. Al-Qa'ida elements could conceivably establish a position just across the porous LoC from Pakistan.

¶8. (SBU) Al-Qa'ida as a new actor in the Valley may conversely be viewed as an asset to a desperate people, compared to the groups active in J&K for over a decade. University of Kashmir Law Professor Sheikh Showcat Hussein told journalists "the desperation is to such an extent here, whoever is ready to support people, whether it is al-Qa'ida or anyone else, people are receptive to them."

¶9. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)
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